

## Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 16351

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, TH

SUBJ: PROBE INTO GOVERNOR PRAMOON SATTHATHIP'S INVOLVEMENT  
IN A MURDER CASE

SUMMARY: FORMER PRIME MINISTER THANOM KITTIKACHORN LAUNCHED AN INQUIRY, THROUGH THE INTERIOR MINISTRY, INTO THE ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT OF GOVERNOR PRAMOON SATTHATHIP IN THE MURDER OF A MILITIAMAN AT ROI ET LAST JANUARY. PRAMOON WAS GOVERNOR OF ROI ET PROVINCE AT THE TIME, AND WAS NEARBY WHEN THE SLAYING OCCURRED. IN A ROUTINE SHIFT OF PROVINCIAL GOVERNORS, HE HAS RECENTLY TAKEN UP HIS NEW ASSIGNMENT, EFFECTIVE OCTOBER 1, AS GOVERNOR OF NAKHON RATCHASIMA. UNDER THE SANYA GOVERNMENT PRAMOON'S POSITION MAY BE IN JEOPARDY. END SUMMARY.

1. ALTHOUGH THE ROI ET MILITARY COURT SENTENCED THE KILLER OF THE MILITIAMAN TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT, THE PRESS HAS KEPT THE CASE IN THE PUBLIC EYE OWING TO THE PRESENCE OF PRAMOON AND OTHER PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS AT OR NEAR THE SCENE OF THE MURDER. BEFORE HIS DEATH, THE MILITIAMAN HAD FREQUENTLY PETITIONED AGAINST UNJUST TREATMENT BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. THE GOVERNOR HAD ALLEGEDLY INTERVIEWED THE VICTIM JUST PRIOR TO HIS DEATH AND HAD ORDERED HIS HANDS TIED BEHIND HIS BACK. FOL-  
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LOWING THE SHOOTING, THE GOVERNOR WAS INVOLVED IN A COVER-UP OF THE MURDER BY ORDERING THE BODY CONVEYED TO

AND LEFT IN ANOTHER PROVINCE. WHILE THE COURT DEALT ONLY WITH THE ACTUAL MURDER, IT ALSO DREW ATTENTION TO THE NUMBER OF OTHER RESPONSIBLE OFFICIALS WHO APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN IMPLICATED AS ACCESSORIES ALONG WITH THE GOVERNOR.

2. COMMENT: THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE CASE ARE MURKY DESPITE THE FACT THAT PRAMOON AND FIFTY OTHERS WERE AT OR NEAR THE SCENE OF THE MURDER. IRRESPONSIBILITY ON THE PART OF HIGH OFFICIALS IS CLEARLY INDICATED, AND PRESS EDITORIALS HAVE FOCUSSED ON THE MANY CONFLICTING ALLEGATIONS WHICH HAVE COME TO LIGHT. THE CASE HAS BECOME SO CELEBRATED THAT THANOM HAD LITTLE CHOICE BUT TO ORDER AN INQUIRY.

3. GOVERNOR PRAMOON'S RECENT TRANSFER TO KORAT, THE COUNTRY'S SECOND LARGEST PROVINCE IN POPULATION, WAS NOT RELATED TO THE MURDER CASE BUT PART OF A ROUTINE REASSIGNMENT OF SEVERAL PROVINCIAL GOVERNORS. PRAMOON IS A KORAT NATIVE, AND CONSIDERED TO HAVE MANY KEY CONTACTS. PRAMOON MAY NOT BE AROUND LONG TO ENJOY KORAT, HOWEVER. FORMER DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PRAPHAT CHARUSATHIEN WAS PRAMOON'S PATRON, AND THE NEW INTERIOR MINISTER HAS A REPUTATION FOR OPPOSING CORRUPT OFFICIALS. PRAMOON MAY NOT FIT THE SANYA GOVERNMENT IMAGE.  
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